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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5858  
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6907  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5714  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2274  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0519  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1418  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3964  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0819  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2359  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1075  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0447  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0931  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 002424

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2031  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONER FACING THREATS

REF: A. 04 CARACAS 1910

[1](#)B. 04 CARACAS 3270

CARACAS 00002424 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,  
for Reason 1.4(b).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Former Finance Minister and retired Brigadier General Francisco Uson Ramirez, incarcerated since 2004, faces threats of physical harm, according to reports to the Embassy from family members. Uson, openly supportive of the opposition, was listed as a political prisoner in the Department's 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Venezuela. He is serving a five and one-half year term for alleged "defamation" of the military. Post has remained in contact with his family. END SUMMARY

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THREATS INSIDE RAMO VERDE PRISON  
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[1](#)2. (C) Post received information from General Uson's wife detailing threats of physical harm against Uson and other political prisoners held at Ramo Verde, a military prison. Uson's wife reported that she has received information over the last month indicating her husband's "physical or mental integrity" was in danger. She claimed that prison authorities were mounting an effort to "eliminate" certain prisoners who were an "annoyance" to this government. Specifically, she received a warning that her husband should not go out to do his exercises alone or let his guard down while in his cell.

[1](#)3. (C) At the time of Uson's initial detention and trial,

there was considerable debate as to whether or not Uson should be tried in a civil or military court. The argument centered around Uson's status as a retired general and whether or not he was under the jurisdiction of military courts. Uson was ultimately tried and convicted in a military court for defaming the military through his description of the use of a flame thrower during a fire, thereby implying military involvement in the alleged punishment-related deaths of two soldiers (reftels). His lawyer stated at the time that given the length of the sentence (five and one-half years), he was pleased to see Uson tried in a military court, because conditions in the Ramo Verde military prison were much superior to those of civilian prisons and that, due to his rank, Uson would receive excellent treatment.

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TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY  
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14. (C/NF) Taking advantage of an already-existing appointment, Emboffs spoke off the record with journalist Phil Gunson (a stringer for the Economist and the Miami Herald) (protect) on August 4 to gauge what knowledge he may have of Uson's situation, and to share the information we had received. Gunson informed PolCouns that these threats were news to him, though he wondered if such retribution might be visited upon Uson after an interview he had given a couple of weeks prior. Uson had spoken to major television outlet RCTV about the general political situation plaguing Venezuela. Gunson characterized the interview as "quite brave, given his circumstances." (NOTE: It is not unusual for political prisoners to be granted access to the media for interviews, along with certain other privileges, such as a cellular telephone, more frequent family visits, and a private cell. They pay for these privileges, and BRV prison officials line

CARACAS 00002424 002.2 OF 002

their pockets with the proceeds. END NOTE)

15. (C) Poloff also discussed Uson's situation August 9 with retired Vice Admiral Rafael Huizi. Huizi was aware of the threats against Uson and believes they are part of a calculated effort to separate Uson from other voices of dissent within the military prison system. As part of a good behavior program, Huizi said, Uson has given a series of sanctioned lectures to lower ranking incarcerated military officers. According to Huizi, through these talks, Uson developed a significant following and, in conjunction with other high-profile military detainees, has assumed a leadership role potentially threatening to prison administrators. Huizi said the threats against Uson may provide the BRV an excuse to relocate Uson to another facility under the guise of protecting Uson's safety.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) Uson is one of several political prisoners Post is following. His treatment by the BRV is consistent with Chavista efforts to intimidate high-profile opponents. Post raises political prosecutions regularly with interested NGOs, media outlets, and third country diplomats, and frequently sends a representative to politically significant trials, and encourages other diplomatic missions to do likewise. Such proactivity reinforces our democracy promotion efforts and helps to expose some of the human rights abuses of the Chavez government.

WHITAKER